

What Have We gained in the Sinaitic Palimpsest?

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VII.

The Gospel of John.

*21¹.—‘at the *lake* of Tiberias,’ etc.

21².—‘called Didymus,’ is omitted. It is superfluous in a Syriac text. Yet it is found in the Peshitta and the Palestinian Syriac.

*21².—‘and Nathanael, he who was of *Catana* in Galilee’ (with the Peshitta). One Palestinian Syriac text has *Canatha*.

*21⁴.—‘Jesus stood on the shore *of the lake*.’

*21⁶.—‘And when they had cast *as he had said unto them, they sought to pull the net into the ship, and they could not for the weight of many fishes which it held.*’

*21⁷.—‘he took his coat, and girt it about his loins, and cast himself into *the lake and was swimming, and came, for they were not far from the land.*’

21⁸.—‘for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits off,’ is omitted, the first part of it being in v.⁷.

21⁸.—‘full of fishes,’ is omitted.

*21⁹.—‘they found *before Jesus* live coals of fire.’

21¹³.—‘And Jesus took the bread and the fish, and *blessed them* (literally, “*blessed upon them*”), and gave to them.’ The same expressions used in Mt 26²⁶.

It cannot therefore have been anything peculiar to the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

21¹⁵.—‘more than these,’ is omitted (with some Old Latin MSS).

21¹⁵.—‘thou knowest that I love thee,’ is omitted (with the Old Latin Codex Vercellensis).

It occurs in this text only in v.¹⁷.

*21¹⁶.—‘Thou Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me *much?*’

*21¹⁷.—‘Simon was grieved because three times Jesus spake *thus unto him.*’ ‘Lovest thou me?’ is here omitted. There is less repetition in this narrative than in that of the Revised Version, yet nothing is lost; the story gains somewhat in dignity; and there is the same gradation in

‘Feed my lambs; feed my sheep; feed my flock.’

*21¹⁸.—‘and shall *drive* thee whither thou wouldest not.’

*21²².—‘Follow thou me *now.*’

*21²³.—‘what is that to thee?’ is omitted (with Codex Sinaiticus, the Old Latin Codex Vercellensis, and the oldest form of the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary).

*21²⁵.—‘And Jesus did many other things, which if they were written one by one, the world would not suffice for them,’—twenty-one words as against thirty-five of the Revised Version.

‘Here endeth the Gospel of the *Mepharreshe* four books. Glory to God and to His Christ, and to His Holy Spirit. Let every one who reads and hears and keeps and does [it] pray for the sinner who wrote [it]. May God in His tender mercy forgive him his sins in both worlds. Amen and Amen.’

The word *Mepharreshe* is a link between those two specimens of the Old Syriac versions, the Syro-Antiochene Palimpsest and the Curetonian. In the latter it is prefixed to the Gospel of St. Matthew alone; here it is evidently applied to all four. The word may be rendered either as ‘separate’ or as ‘translated.’ The first meaning is in this case the more likely one, seeing that Tatian’s *Diatessarōn* was entitled the *Mehallette*, or ‘mixed.’ This, however, in no way affects our estimate concerning the age of the text, for the epithet might well be added by a fourth century copyist.

Another peculiarity of the Sinai text is the use of the word ‘*Maran*,’ ‘our Lord,’ instead of ‘Jesus,’ in a large portion of it. It occurs from Mt 8³ to 11¹ and from Jn 1⁸⁸ to 6⁵.

This is supposed to be due to the reverent affection for the Saviour entertained by the translator.

Since I deciphered the dim lines which contain

the first half of the final colophon (belonging to the upper script), from my photographs, on Good Friday 1900—lines containing the names of the district and of the monastery where this text of the Gospels was covered over in the eighth century with the 'Select Narratives of Holy Women,' the district Antioch—the monastery Beth Mari-Qanūn, and since Mr. Burkitt added thereto the name of the village Ma'arrath Meşrin, from the late Professor Bensly's copy of a previous very clear colophon, every probability that this ancient text was produced at Mount Sinai has for ever vanished. True, it may have been brought to an Antiochene monastery from Egypt, from Mesopotamia, or from elsewhere, but old vellum was not likely to be a profitable export from the Arabian desert; and it would be passing strange if the finished palimpsest was really returned to the very monastery whence its half-written pages had been carried at some period before the eighth century. No, the earliest of Syriac versions was likely to be copied only where there was a native Syrian Church, and a seat of Syriac learning, such as was found at Antioch on the Orontes, or at Edessa. Rabbula, bishop of Edessa, in the fifth century, issued a decree that a copy of the Separate Gospels should be read in every church instead of Tatian's *Diatessarōn*. This copy was probably the Peshitta, perhaps as revised by himself,¹ for had it been the Old Syriac, surely more than two specimens of it would come down to the present day. The multiplication of copies of the Peshitta probably caused those of the Old Syriac to become obsolete, and fit only for the use of men like John the Stylite. The *Diatessarōn* was perhaps written at Edessa, and there the Peshitta was revised. Now the Tales of Holy Women, which overlie the Gospels of our palimpsest, were certainly written near Antioch, and the last of them, Cyprian and Justa, has a distinctly Antiochene flavour, for there (as a reviewer in the *Scotsman* lately observed) its demon boasts of having 'shaken the whole city, and overturned walls,' alluding, doubtless, to the terrible earth-

¹ See Dr. William Wright on 'Syriac Literature' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p. 825.

quakes with which Antioch was visited in the first two centuries of our era. I may perhaps be mistaken, but I do not find it difficult to imagine that as the Peshitta was highly appreciated in Edessa, so the Old Syriac version may have been cherished in the older seat of Aramaic learning, in the town where the disciples were first called Christians.

To sum up, we have seen that several important narratives, such as Lk 22, Jn 17, and Jn 18 are better arranged and more concise than they are in any other text extant; that several variants, such as those in Mt. 18¹⁷, Mk 16⁸, Lk 1^{63, 64} 7²⁹ 23¹⁵, Jn 8⁵⁷ 16^{29, 30}, whether corroborated or not by other ancient manuscripts, bear within themselves a witness to their own truthfulness; that the chief agreement is with the so-called Western texts; but that there are many variants which belong only to the palimpsest. These, however, bring into stronger relief the immense majority of passages in which its text is in close agreement with that of our Revised Version.

Tischendorf has pointed out that variants and even corruptions of the text are in themselves a strong proof that the Gospels were written in the first century; because there is not one of these which cannot be traced back to the second century; and the pure text is naturally older than its corruptions. The great aim of textual critics in the present day is to ascertain what that pure text is.

A still more difficult question presents itself. Why has God not protected the transmission of these sacred books? Why has He allowed variants to exist? The answer may be that His work is not mechanical, like ours. And is it not possible that we have ourselves confounded the idea of inspiration with that of dictation? The latter would have meant the production of a text whose every letter might have been worshipped; the former means that God put into the hearts of chosen men the desire to write what they knew for a certainty about His dealings with them, but that He left them at perfect liberty both to express and to transmit His meaning in their own way.